

PUBLIC WITNESS PREP

What is a Public Witness?

The Public Witness at IFTJ weaves together music, prayer, and elements of rallies, highlighting the Ignatian Solidarity Network's vision of a just, peaceful, and loving world.

The Public Witness seeks to empower students, faculty, and other participants to demonstrate how collective voices can join together and make positive steps towards change.

Why: Advocacy and public witness are important ways that we pursue justice and love for our neighbors. We publicly bring attention to flaws in our current social and economic structures to create opportunities and momentum for positive and restorative change.

Being at Columbus Plaza:

While we gather at Columbus Plaza to exercise some of the most powerful rights we enjoy in the United States of America—the right to gather non-violently, to speak freely, and to advocate—we acknowledge the grave injustices inflicted on so many throughout our country's history.

From the earliest of days of what would become the U.S., colonization nearly annihilated an entire continent of indigenous people—including at the hands of Christopher Columbus. We acknowledge today the imperfection of this space where we gather, and we encourage you to frame this gathering as a reclaiming of an unjust space as we prepare to tangibly continue to fight for justice as advocates for those whose voices often go unheard.

In this spirit we will begin the Public Witness with Land Acknowledgments, to show respect and to take a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase the culture, history, existence, and current work of Indigenous people. For more information on the Indigenous tradition of Land and Territory Acknowledgments and how the practice is being adapted to raise awareness at non-Indigenous public gatherings try [these resources](#).

The Tradition of Public Action in the Catholic Faith:

Catholic movements in the United States have addressed a issues from labor, war, immigration, and environmental protection, to human rights, women's rights, exploitive development practices, and bellicose foreign policies. These Catholic social movements have helped to draw attention to the Gospel message of standing with the vulnerable and oppressed.

[Learn more about some famous Catholic activists.](#)



Public Witness Order of Events:

Land Acknowledgements & Prayer
Welcome

Speaker - Faith-Based Public Action
Song

Speaker - Humane Immigration Reform
Song

Speaker - Environmental Justice Now
Closing Blessing and Songs

How to Prepare:

Review songs and chants with your delegation: igsol.net/chants2019

Create art for the Public Witness: Use text/themes from chants and/or the advocacy talking points—"Humane Immigration Reform Now!", "Policy Change Not Climate Change"—to create eye-catching art

Discuss levels of involvement and discomfort:

- This may be the first public action for some attendees. It is important to acknowledge that some people might be uncomfortable holding signs or chanting. Let them know they do not have to do either.
- If bringing art, decide who from the group will be in charge of signs/artwork on the day of the event.
- Let people know that on Sunday night, after mass, ISN will be asking for volunteers who would be willing to hand out info sheets to interested passersby and other volunteers to act as chant leaders during the public witness on Monday.

Practice responses: It is always important to have succinct comments prepared in case a participant is approached by an inquiring passerby or a member of the media. Suggested responses include:

My name is _____. I am a _____ at _____ and I am here with the Ignatian Solidarity Network to call on Congress to support humane immigration reform and to take action on climate change, particularly protecting vulnerable communities.

Don't feel ready to answer questions? Politely introduce the questioner to your delegation leader.

What Not to Do:

Do not engage with instigators. In the event that there may be people trying to counter our peaceful action, do not engage them. Politely remove yourself from their vicinity and continue with your actions.

Afterwards:

- Gather to evaluate the experience and your takeaways.
- Write an article about the experience for your school, church, community newsletter, or ISN
- Keep a record of contacts made at the event.

Want to take your public action to the next level?

Check out this brief resource: [Christian Discipleship: Other Types of Public Action](#)

QUESTIONS?

Contact Lena Chapin at 216-397-2082 or lchapin@ignatiansolidarity.net